

"BUNKER BOCOCK OF THE TAFT SCHOOL"

Part I

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by

Bob Foreman

BUNKER BOCOCK OF THE TAFT SCHOOL

While the school slept, a light flashed on in Congdon House, the dormitory for middlers at Taft in Watertown, Connecticut.

"Wake up, Billy," cried Bunker Bocock.

Billy Waldron was lying face up with his hands crossed over his chest, a pose which Bunker found eerily disconcerting.

"Wake up, dude!" Bunker gave Billy's shoulder a gentle shake. "It's eleven o'clock!"

"Who shot me?" asked Billy in his Minnesota twang, as he sat bolt upright.

"Pizza's here," said Bunker.

"Yum yum yum!" exclaimed Billy, as the appetizing aroma of anchovies and pepperoni reached his nose. He jumped down from his bunk, yawned, stretched, and started to dress.

"I sure hope nobody besides me ever finds out you sleep with a car magazine under your pillow," said Bunker, closely examining the periodical which had fallen to the floor when Billy jumped.

"Oh, yeah?" retorted Billy. "Well, I sure hope no one besides me ever finds out you sleep with a koala doll under your pillow," jerking the helpless bear from its hiding place.

"Don't hurt him!" cried Bunker, as Billy playfully tossed the bear into the air.

"Say, I have a TL for you!" said Billy, chucking Bunker back his pet. "I think maybe faculty brat Didi Dodge said your horn-rimmed eyeglasses make you look exceedingly cute."

"Serious?"

"Cross my heart and hope to lie," replied Billy as he donned his beloved cowboy boots. "Excessively cute!"

"Well, I think I might have overheard faculty brat Plunkie Plymouth saying you were cute, too."

"How cute do you think you might have heard I was?"

"Terribly cute. Immensely cute. Cloyingly cute."

Billy carefully combed his hair in the mirror. "Thank you. In three weeks when I turn sixteen, I will remember you as one of the people who made me who I am today."

An all but inaudible knock at the door announced the entrance of Dire Wolfe, who darted into the room clutching a smaller boy by the shoulders. The boy was lugging an attaché case so large it made him seem even smaller.

"Hey guys," whispered Dire Wolfe, as he shut the door silently behind him, "this is Angel Dave. I thought he might like to meet you. And vice-versa."

Before Bunker and Billy knew what was happening, Dire Wolfe shoved Angel Dave into the recliner, clapped a pair of headphones over his ears, put "Bus Stop" on the turntable, and set it to repeat.

"Now we can speak freely," he said, breathing a deep sigh of relief. "I caught this little dude just this second on his way out the door. See that briefcase? He was going to run away. He's a big mess and I thought maybe some pizza and music might be just what Doctor No ordered."

"Definitely!" exclaimed Billy. "But first we must officially call the meeting to order." Billy jumped atop a small crate, making him even taller than the others.

"I hereby proclaim this here Saturday night, October 25, 1969 to be the fifth consecutive not-strictly-illegal theme writers' all-nighter, and I dedicate it to Paul McCartney, who is either dead or alive as we may or may not find out tonight. All in favor, say aye!"

"Aye!"

"And now Bunker Bocock, as Sergeant's Pepper at Arms, will you please convoke us?" Bunker took Billy's place on the crate.

"Good bread, good meat, good God, let's eat!" exclaimed Bunker, genuflecting. He jumped down, upended the crate, and shoved it in front of Angel Dave, as Billy placed upon it one of the large pizzas.

"Savory!" said Dire Wolfe. "Let's get this show on the road!"

"Here's a soda, Angel Dave, ice-cold!" mimed Bunker elaborately, "napkins... and salt... and pepper!"

The other pizzas were distributed, chairs were occupied, and the boys began to banquet themselves lustily.

Between man-sized mouthfuls, Dire Wolfe continued his saga.

"Someone, and I don't know his name, pulled the brother gag on Angel Dave up at the rink this evening, and it was the last straw. He just broke down."

"What gag?" asked Bunker.

"Well, Angel Dave was watching Varsity hockey practice and said 'Gee, I'd love to be able to skate like that guy Jack Weevil.' And this other guy overheard Angel Dave and said, 'Kid, when Jack Weevil comes off the ice, ask him about his twin brother who's captain for Hotchkiss-- he's twice as good.' Well, Weevil was wise to the gag, and when Angel Dave asked him, he replied with a straight face, 'My brother is dead.' Now, Angel Dave is an orphan with two dead parents, so he just burst into tears and

ran out into the safety of the woods, the resounding echoes of cruel laughter ringing in his ears."

"Oh man, that's rough," said Billy.

"That's where I found him, chain smoking and crying his eyes out in the woods. He could hardly keep his cigarette lit because of his tears."

"Weevil and that other guy ought to be electrocuted," said Bunker.

"He's so small. He's not a lower mid, is he?" asked Billy.

"No, he's a mid like us, but he just started this year. I think he's from a foreign country."

The room was silent for a few moments as the boys devoured their pizza. Then abruptly from his mouth, Billy let out an extremely loud noise of great satisfaction.

"Hey, quiet down, dudoid!" laughed Dire Wolfe. "What if Mr. Whipp is still creeping around out there?"

"I wish it was Mrs. Whipp creeping around out there," said Bunker, referring to the curvaceous art teacher. "Or in here..."

Angel Dave pulled off his headphones and spoke up in a small voice.

"You sure have a nice stereo," he said, with a slight trace of a foreign accent. "I've never seen headphones like this."

"Sennheiser! Five ounces, German, new invention," said Billy. "Only thirty bucks a pop."

"Much better than the Koss 'phones in the library filled with weird gooey stuff," said Bunker. "Don't get any on you."

"And a reel-to-reel tape deck even," said Angel Dave.
"This place is like paradise compared to my room."

"That's all Billy's," said Bunker. "His family is rich."

"Money talks and nobody walks! I hope that doesn't make me less of a man in your eyes," said Billy, striking a television wrestling pose.

"That's funny!" said Angel Dave, laughing out loud.

"Hey, tell Angel Dave how you guys became roommates!" said Dire Wolfe.

The boys stood up and went into their act.

Bunker: "I'm Bunker Bocock! I'm a Taurus!"

Billy: "I'm Billy Waldron! I'm a Scorpio!"

Bunker: "Me and Billy met in the glee club last year and we found out..."

Billy: "We're both tenors and..."

Both: "We both have perfect pitch."

They hit a chord.

Billy: "And also we found out that we both wake up with a tune in our head, like today it was 'Bus Stop' by the Hollies..."

Bunker: "Because we've been playing it so much..."

Billy: "My sister Luci sent it to me..."

Bunker: "And then we found out we were both in bands in Junior High..."

Billy: "...in Wayzata, Minn!" Pronounce it Y-zetta!

Bunker: "...in Waterbury, Conn!" Pronounce it Waterbury!

Billy: "I was in The Emperors."

Bunker: "And I was in General Lee and the Rebels."

Billy: "And at home, we both have the same guitar!"

Both: "Fender Jazzmaster!"

Billy: "And then we found out we asked the same questions like, 'what's outside the universe?'"

Bunker: "And 'if God created the universe, who created God?'"

Billy: "So we figured we should be roommates."

Bunker: "Then we got ole Dire Wolfe here to join the Glee Club..."

Billy: "and the rest is historiography, as they say."

"You should hear us tear up 'Jerusalem' at Vespers!" exclaimed Dire Wolfe.

Billy gave the note, the three hit a triad and sang in close harmony, "A-mong these dark sa-tan-ic mills."

"You guys sound great, seriously!" said Angel Dave, enthusiastically.

"Hey, I just thought of something!" said Dire Wolfe. "We're the 'dark satanic mills brothers!'"

"We've been favorably compared with the Vienna Sausage Boys Choir," said Bunker.

"With a little more practice, we could play Norman's Tabernacle," said Billy.

"I know that hymn," said Angel Dave, removing his 'phones and standing up. "Can I sing with you? From, 'I will not cease from mental fight'?"

Billy gave the note and the four boys sang:

"I will not cease from mental fight

Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Je-ru-sa-lem
In every green and pleasant land."

One, two, three, four, five seconds passed before Dire Wolfe broke the silence.

"Little dude, you really tore that up! I can't believe you're a bass! That last note, you hit a low E! You really took my breath away!" Dire Wolfe grabbed Angel Dave and squeezed him so hard his freckled face turned bright red and he emitted a high-pitched giggle.

"Sha-zam, sha-zam, sha-zam!" intoned Billy.

"Take your coat off and stay a while!" said Bunker.

"That was freakin' perfect!" raved Dire Wolfe, still breathless. "You are the missing link!"

"The lost chord!" echoed Billy.

For the first time that evening, Angel Dave smiled and electricity was in the air.

"With the powers invested in me," said Billy, "I do hereby automatically initiate Angel Dave as a member of our merry band of all-nighter theme writers!"

As Angel Dave took off his winter coat, the boys scurried about, clearing away the pizza debris.

"Half a box left!" exclaimed Bunker. He and Billy set out study materials on their desks where the pizza had been.

"In case Mr. Whipp should pay us an unexpected visit, we have to make it look like we were studying," Billy explained to Angel Dave.

"What's your favorite pop music?" asked Dire Wolfe.

Angel Dave looked down at the floor in embarrassment. "I really don't know any pop tunes," he said, sadly.

"No pop tunes?" asked Bunker. "Why, pop music is the glue that holds the universe together!"

"Back home, didn't you listen to top 40 radio?" asked Billy.

"We had no top-40 radio stations," replied Angel Dave.

The boys stared at him in openmouthed astonishment.

"Here in Connecticut, your radio and TV stations start with the letter W," said Angel Dave. "Not where I come from."

"Hey, that is not a problem," said Billy. "Where I live In Wayzata, half the stations start with W and half the stations start with K. But does that make me insane?"

"Yes," replied Bunker.

"Where I am from," said Angel Dave, "they don't start with W or K-- they start with X-- XHBC-TV and XED radio-- and on neither can you hear a word of English."

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" exclaimed Bunker. "What God-forsaken place do you friggin' live in, anyway?"

"California," replied Angel Dave.

"California?" asked Billy in disbelief. "Don't they speak English there?"

"I live on the Mexican border in a tiny California town named Calxico. The other half of the town is called Mexicali, and it's in Mexico. There's a rhyme to help you remember:

Calxico and Mexicali
Sittin' in a tree
One's in California
And the other is in a foreign country."

"That's some rhyme!" commented Bunker.

"That's why people think half of me is foreign," said Angel Dave.

"Does Calexico have a winter?" asked Dire Wolfe who hailed from nearby Fishampton, Connecticut and knew little else.

"Where I am from," continued Angel Dave, "they have no ice hockey. I had never heard of ice hockey before I got here. You see what I am wearing?" he asked, plucking at the strap of his well-worn sleeveless undershirt. "I never knew of long underwear. And your words! What we call sophomores, you call mids. What we called teachers, you call masters. What you call themes, we called essays. Nobody told me this was a school for all boys. And the stuff they teach here is so strange, I feel like I'm in fourth grade. This morning my English teacher taught us 'but what.'"

He consulted his hand. "I'm not so sure but what I am myself," he taught us. I had to write it on my hand to remember."

"It's confusin'," admitted Dire Wolfe. "But I guess you can speak Spanish pretty good, huh?" he asked, in an encouraging tone.

"Nada lick-- when my parents were alive we had a translator to live with us. After that... well, I didn't do much talkin'."

"Hey, but your climate must be great!" exclaimed Bunker. "Plenty of beach days, right?"

"Today, October 25th, the temperature there is 122 degrees. There are no beaches within a hundred miles and we have no air-conditioners. The only cool place is inside the old church-- Our Lady of Guadalupe. That's how I knew the hymn you were singing."

"But haven't you listened to the radio since you got to Taft?" asked Bunker.

"I can't listen to the radio in my room because of my roommate," explained Angel Dave. "At first the guy was

perfectly normal. Then he changed. If he's not studying, he's playing sappy folk songs to me on his guitar. He's always preaching at me, telling me what to do, telling me what's right and what's wrong, and he's 5'10" already, so he makes me feel like a midget. And when he's not signing or lecturing, he's reading me letters he wrote to 'Boy's Life' about seeing The Four Freshmen. Did you ever talk to someone and think their whole life was an act? And that their whole act was a lie? That guy's a real varsity drag."

"You can change roommates," said Bunker. "I changed last year after they gave me this little maniac named Grantby Manners. I went on a weekend with him to his parents' house in Darien and he broke into the liquor cabinet. We got really, really drunk. I was so sick that I had to go to the infirmary when we returned."

"And this year, he's my roommate," said Dire Wolfe with a wry expression.

"I didn't know you could change roommates," said Angel Dave. "Until I met Dire Wolfe and you guys tonight, nobody told me nothing. Speaking of nothing, do you guys have any smokes?"

"Sorry, we're clean out," replied Bunker.

"I tried to buy a pack," said Angel Dave, "but I'm so small, people think I'm thirteen and they won't sell me any."

"Same with me and Bunker," said Dire Wolfe, "even though we're 5'5". And because of my long hair, they think I'm a girl."

"I'm 5'9" with my boots on, but still they think I'm too young," said Billy. "And they had Winston cartons on sale for four dollars!"

"Where did you get the smokes you had up at the rink?" asked Dire Wolfe.

"I brought a whole pack with me from home," said Angel Dave, "and they lasted me over a month. But now I don't

have any money to buy more if I could. I had five thousand dollars..."

"Five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Billy. "You could buy a Lamborghini for five thousand dollars! V-12!"

"Where did you get five grand?" asked Bunker.

"Since I became an orphan three years ago I worked at nights, after school and during the summer. But then my guardian-- I don't want to say his name-- Guardian X, he found my cash and stole it and that's why he sent me here, so I couldn't earn any more money."

"Wow," said Bunker. "I only saved up thirty-six dollars one time, and I thought that was a lot. I lost it all on a ventriloquism set."

"Guardian X said he would give the money back to me when I turned twenty-five-- but that's in ten years. Do you know how long that is?" he asked gloomily.

"Guardian X ought to be electrocuted," said Bunker.

"Even if we had any, we couldn't smoke 'em here," said Billy.

"Billy, put on 'Midnight Cowboy,'" suggested Bunker.

As Billy put on the tape, he explained to Angel Dave, "Midnight Cowboy is this movie about this guy Ratso Rizzo and pretty much all he does is smoke. Me and this kid Golfsticks went to the City to see it when we had the holiday last week. In New York they let you smoke in the theatre!"

"They used to let me smoke in the church in Calxico," said Angel Dave, smiling. "It was so nice and cool. I'd just sit behind the altar and smoke and sing and string rosary beads for other orphans. It was really the only decent thing you can say about Calxico."

"Dire Wolfe and Bunker co-authored an entire dissertation on the subject of smoking at Taft last year for our

Western Civ. class," said Billy. "But it was rejected as being too..."

"'Smokey' was the word they used," said Dire Wolfe.

"He said we had congestion of the brain," said Bunker.

"But didn't he say one nice thing?" asked Billy.

"Oh, yeah-- he said we had a 'terrific loquacity.'"

"It was beautiful," said Bunker, as the harmonica solo from 'Midnight Cowboy' began softly to play behind him.

"'Sometimes I think Taft is held together entirely by smoke,'" was our first line.

"Did you both write that one sentence?" asked Angel Dave.

"I was really the color man-- Dire Wolfe knows all the stats," replied Bunker. "He's kind of a stickler for rules..."

"Dude, that's not really fair..." objected Dire Wolfe.

"Oh yeah, I don't mean to say he obeys the rules, I just meant he knows what they are."

Dire Wolfe extracted from his corduroys a well-thumbed copy of the pocket-sized 'Taft Student Handbook.' "It's just that I like to know what rules I'm breaking."

"It's very helpful," said Billy, "because myself and Bunker here haven't yet had a chance to open our copies."

"Smoking is a sacred institution at the school," continued Dire Wolfe. "More space is given over to the subject of smoking in the 'Handbook' than the honor system and honor roll combined."

"The Headmaster smokes, the Deans smoke, the dietician smokes, even nurses in Infirmary enjoy a healthful drag. Half the faculty smokes and all of the English Department," said Dire Wolfe.

"Wow," said Angel Dave.

"The center of faculty smoking is on what they call 'Nicotine Boulevard'-- the main corridor of HDT, named for Horace Dutton Taft, President Taft's brother-- across from the Harley Roberts memorial reception room. At that intersection, you will find not only the smoke-filled faculty lounge, but also the office of Mr. Sullivan, Director of Studies, whose door is always open and who smokes non-stop, while his sweet dog Pippa sleeps outside the door, her wits dulled by the sweet aroma."

"Bunker and me," interjected Billy, "took English from Mr. Valentine whose classroom was right between the faculty lounge and Mr. Sullivan's office and we got to inhale cigarette and coffee fumes every morning for the entire year!"

"Next time you're in the neighborhood, take a close look at Mr. Sullivan," said Bunker to Angel Dave. "He has nicotine stains on his forehead! Because he props up his head with his cigarette hand while he smokes."

"Wow!" said Angel Dave.

"Mr. Sullivan is the king of smokers," said Billy, "taking the title away from Mr. Logan who last year dropped dead and who generously donated his lungs to blacktop two runways at Logan Field, the airport in Boston!"

"And," Dire Wolfe noted, "smoking for us kids is illegal, except for seniors, who are rewarded with the *Smoking Privilege* and use of the Wade house, to just sit there and smoke and smoke and smoke."

"That's my idea of heaven," said Bunker.

"Until then," said Dire Wolfe, "the best cigarette is the illegal one, and 'illegal smoking among lower classmen forges friendships which last all of time.' That was our last line."

"That should be the school song," said Angel Dave solemnly.

"And here we are," lamented Billy, "ensconced in our second floor corner lair in Congdon House, in the best cross-ventilated dorm room on campus, and we can't use it to its full and beautiful potential because we are not permitted to smoke!"

"Are all-nighters illegal?" asked Angel Dave.

"Not technically," answered Dire Wolfe. "Lights out for mids is at ten. But what if you wake up at eleven and turn them back on? That's legal. There is nothing in the book which says you have to sleep eight hours; perhaps all you need is a half-hour. So now you've gotten up early for the next day."

"What about going downtown to have breakfast at Mike's at 6AM?" asked Bunker.

Dire Wolfe consulted his book. "'Boys may go downtown from 7AM till 6PM on Sundays. So if you go there at 7AM, it's legal."

"But no fun," said Billy. "And just in case Mr. Whipp does come around... Angel Dave, go over and jerk the door open."

"Now?" he asked.

"Yeah, pretend you're Mr. Whipp and whip the door open!"

Angel Dave jumped up, jerked the corridor door open and instantly the music went off and the room was plunged into darkness.

"Magic blackout!" exclaimed Angel Dave in amazement. He closed the door gently and the lights and music came back on.

"Billy's an electrical whiz," explained Dire Wolfe. "He's Dyke's assistant!"

"Dykes?" asked Angel Dave. "Like the Dutch boy?"

"Tommy Dykes," said Billy, striding over to face Angel Dave, "is the senior in charge of the Bingham Auditorium stage, and I just got made his assistant. He's this cool kid with an arch sparkle in his eye. He's indispensable! Have you ever been backstage?"

"Nope," replied Angel Dave.

"The stage is an excellent spooky place with bare brick walls rising forty feet up to this steel grid you can walk on," said Billy, "with a cupola on top that opens! It's like the Munsters and H.P. Lovecraft, complete with a B-3 Hammond organ in the pit."

"Wow!"

"There's a real movie theatre projection booth with arc lights that can blind you, and the picture sheet is transparent so you can watch the movie from backstage backwards! Everything can fly up to the grid or vanish like the footlights or drop down through traps in the floor. There's a hundred different colored lights with cables and dimmers, and it's a regular boiler factory of smoking pleasure with tons of secret cigarette places. It's like this gigantic erector set with no adults around to bother you. Plus Dykes plays good music while we work through a giant flying horn! It's outa sight!"

"And you don't need a license to drive it," added Bunker.

"And he always makes you feel welcome, too," said Billy, "like you was just the guy he was waitin' for! And he shows you crazy stuff! Just yesterday, he showed us how to drop the asbestos curtain in case of fire-- and I do mean DROP! The bottom pipe hit the stage so hard that if you was standing there, you'd be cut in two!"

"Jesus!" said Angel Dave, caught up in the fever.

"Dykes is the first guy who really opened my eyes," said Billy, his own eyes glowing with excitement. "It's like backstage is all lit up, and everyone outside of it is stumbling around in the dark."

"He teaches you all about the buildings, too. He says we live in a six-hundred room Gothic castle loaded with secret rooms, tunnels, and servants and we should take advantage of it! 'It is your Kingdom,' he says, 'and it's filled with possibilities.'"

"And don't forget impossibilities," added Bunker.

"And not to mention the strange secrets of the Wombatorium," said Dire Wolfe, mysteriously.

"What's the Wombatorium?" asked Angel Dave, his eyes as big as saucers.

"You're standing in it!" exclaimed Billy. "This building used to be the home for the live-in school servants. You know, the wombos and wombats that work in the kitchen and in the laundry down in the basement?"

"In here?" asked Angel Dave, looking around nervously.

"In this very room," said Bunker, winking at Dire Wolfe.

"You know how servants aren't allowed in the front door?" asked Billy.

"I guess..." replied Angel Dave.

"Well, just to make sure, Congdon House doesn't even *have* a front door! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" Billy walked over to the window and drew back the curtain. "You see over at HDT that big chimney with the little window in it? That's kitchen corridor, hermetically sealed off from the rest of the school. That's where they live now."

"Any dark and stormy night," said Bunker, creeping toward Angel Dave, "one of them might forget where they live and suddenly as hell, you will wake up with a BAT IN YOUR BED!" Just as Bunker said 'BED!' Dire Wolfe snuck up and dug his fingers into the boy's ribs.

"Yiiiiiiiiiii!" cried the Calexican, as he jumped a foot into the air. The whole room burst into laughter.

"Simmer down, morons!" warned Dire Wolfe. "Do you want Mrs. Whipp to storm in here in a state of half-dressed nakedness?"

"With her *petite* bosoms lolling out of her scanty *negligee*?" asked Bunker, who always received high marks in French. "Blind to our seething boyish desires?" he asked, standing eye-to-eye with his blushing questioner.

"B-b-b-b-b-b," stammered Dire Wolfe in a husky Fishampton voice.

"Speaking of Mrs. Whipp," interrupted Billy, "my dad will whip my ass good if I don't improve my grades. I have to buckle down and write my English theme, which is due in thirty-six hours."

"You mean, you guys really do homework when you pull these all-nighters?" asked Angel Dave.

"Bunker prefers to write his five hundred words in fifteen minutes on Monday morning," said Billy.

"Isn't that dangerous?" asked Angel Dave.

"I live for danger," replied Bunker. "And also, last year me and Billy we both got a 73 for the year from Mr. Valentine, so it don't seem to make too much difference!"

"I want to get my theme written," said Billy, "so I can turn my full attention to any new adventures that might crop up during the night. You guys can listen to music on the headphones, it won't bother me one iota."

"I guess I should hit the road then," said Angel Dave, with a brave face. "I don't want to be in the way."

"Well now, hold your horseys there, Angel Dave," said Billy. "I didn't mean for you to leave. Let's figure out a place for you to sleep tonight."

Bunker turned to Dire Wolfe. "If Hartby Manners is away with Golfsticks, why can't Angel Dave crash in your room tonight?"

"Hey, why didn't I think of that?" replied Dire Wolfe.
"Hartby won't be back till tomorrow night."

"Great!" said Billy. "That way Angel Dave'll be right next door and on Monday maybe we can figure out how to let him stay there permanently. Is that OK with you?" asked Billy.

"Gosh, that would be perfect," exclaimed Angel Dave. "To tell the truth I'm starting to fag out about now."

"I'm kind of bushed myself," said Dire Wolfe. "And I gotta make sure Grantby's bed is safe for you to sleep in."

"Angel Dave ought to write a note to his roommate explaining where he is," said Billy, "so he don't get reported as missing. Me and Bunker can secretly deliver it later on tonight."

"What do you want me to write?" asked Angel Dave.

"Well it has to be somewhat truthful..." said Billy.

Billy steered Angel Dave over to his desk and shoved him down in the chair.

"Here Angel Dave," said Billy as he stuck a pen into the boy's right hand, "write 'I am spending the night with a friend from Fishampton and will return Sunday night.' And then sign it like you normally would.'"

Angel Dave didn't make a move.

"Go ahead Angel Dave, write the note," said Bunker.

"I'm sorry... but I can't," replied Angel Dave in a voice that trembled.

"Why not, little dude?" asked Dire Wolfe. "There's no harm in it, you're not lying."

"I can't, I can't, I can't!" exclaimed Dire Wolf as tears began to run down his cheeks.

"How come?" asked Bunker.

"Because I'm left handed! I'm left-handed and I can't help it!" he cried.

The boys just stared at him in wonder.

"There's nothing wrong with being left-handed, Angel Dave," said Billy. "You're crying for no reason."

"You don't understand..." sobbed Angel Dave, as he moved the pen to his left hand and started to write.

"This is the first enjoyable night I've spent since I came to this place and I'll never forget your kindness, and I don't want to spoil it but..." Angel Dave broke down completely and began to weep.

"Little Dude, what's wrong?" asked Dire Wolfe, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder. "You're getting tears all over your writing."

Angel Dave was really sobbing now. "Almost all of my writing has tears on it," he wailed.

"Napkins! Bunker!" commanded Billy.

Angel Dave's small frame was heaving with sobs.

"Little Dude, Billy didn't mean nothing by thinking you were right-handed. Everybody we know is right-handed," said Dire Wolfe helplessly.

"Except for Kelly Green," said Bunker.

"I'm not crying because I'm not right-handed," said Angel Dave. "It's because of Mister Astor!"

"Mister Astor?" asked Billy.

"He's my English teacher."

"Oh no!" said Dire Wolfe.

"I haven't told a soul, I didn't have anyone to turn to."

"What did that guy do to you?" asked Billy, his fists clenched in fury. "Did he lay a hand on you?"

"Oh no," sobbed Angel Dave, "it wasn't like that."

"We've been here five weeks so far, and I've written five themes. I know because I numbered them. The first week, Mister Astor gave us a big pizza feed Sunday night in his hot, tiny apartment before the theme was due the next day. He seemed really nice, so I went to the feed. And on my first theme I got an A+."

"Then the second week I didn't go to the feed and I got a D-. I couldn't understand it at all! My writing was just as good as the week before. I was really upset and all week I thought about how it could have happened. Then I started to wonder-- was it because I hadn't gone to the feed? I thought 'oh that's ridiculous,' but then that Sunday I went to the feed and you know what? I got an A+."

"No way!" said Dire Wolfe.

"Just to make sure, I tested the theory. The next Sunday I skipped the feed again-- and my score was D-. Last week I went to the feed and got an A+. Here, take a look for yourself," said Angel Dave, who had finally stopped crying. He wiped his eyes and pulled his theme book from out of the attaché case.

"You ran away with your theme book?" asked Bunker incredulously.

"I wanted proof. Here, take a look."

The boys clustered around Angel Dave and began to peruse the themes.

"You penmanship is outstanding!" said Bunker encouragingly.

"This title alone should have gotten you an A," said Billy. "'I drowned in a warm bath my seventh bride: the humor of Aldous Huxley.' And that got a D!"

"Here's another D that should have been an A," said Bunker. "'The Refractory Refectory.'"

"The D themes are just as good as the A themes," said Dire Wolfe. "You're right, little dude!"

"What a vindictive bastard!" said Billy.

"That makes me so mad!" said Bunker angrily. "That broils my meat!"

"At first I liked him," said Angel Dave, "because he was always smiling and joking like he was one of us."

"That's his act," said Dire Wolfe.

"Happy Astor!" exclaimed Billy. "That guy's an evil scumbag, but I never thought he'd sink so low as to..."

"*Happy* Astor?" asked Angel Dave. "Why do you call him 'happy'?"

"That's his name," said Billy, "if you can believe it. Happy. They also call him 'Hap.' He's supposed to be from some rich New York City family."

"He's our advisor," said Bunker with disgust. "I and Billy, when they sent out the thing that asked who we wanted last spring, we both picked Mrs. Whipp."

"And they gave us Master Astor," said Billy. "We just ignore him."

"I remember when I met him last winter," said Dire Wolfe, "when he was coaching club hockey. Like you say, he was always smiling and laughing and joking. But at some point he changed, just the way your roommate did, little dude."

"That's right around the time he got John Galt expelled," said Billy.

"Who is John Galt?" asked Angel Dave. "Isn't he out of a book?"

"He was this cool kid who called himself John Galt," explained Billy. "And he put out this cool underground newspaper. It's a long story, but in the end, Astor got John Galt expelled-- for smoking one lousy cigarette. Dykes told me the whole story."

"And yet it seems like everybody adores Astor," said Angel Dave. "I know my roommate worships him."

"He's got everybody snowed, except for us," said Bunker. "The four of us."

"And Dykes," said Billy. "That makes five."

"And we can see right through him," said Bunker.

"It's like one of those optical illusions," said Dire Wolfe. "Once you see it, you see it."

Billy was lost in thought. "'There's no emotion, none, just the pretense of it.'"

"What did you say?" asked Angel Dave with a start.

"Oh, it's just a quote from a movie."

"That's 'The Invasion of the Body Snatchers'!"

"How do you know that?" asked Billy in amazement. "That's our favorite movie!"

"When I was in grade six, that movie was delivered by mistake to my school's boy's health class. Then there was an earthquake and all the roads were closed, so we got to watch it five days in a row! Man, were we scary!"

"That's incredible, little dude," exclaimed Dire Wolfe. "The one thing you know about human life turns out to be the most important!"

"It must be fated," whispered Bunker.

"My friends teased me," said Angel Dave, "because I looked so much like little Jimmy Grimaldi. I screamed

just like him: 'She's not my mother, she's not my mother!'"

"Well, that's what's happening here," said Billy, "and we gotta stop it."

"But that was a movie," said Angel Dave. "You mean the movie has come true?"

"What else can we think?" asked Bunker.

"We have to destroy them, like vigilantes," said Billy. "But first what we have to figure out is how to identify them. We know from the movie that they have no emotions."

"Are they like vampires?" asked Angel Dave.

"Sort of, but vampires are so obvious," said Bunker. "First off, vampires never appear during the day, but the aliens are available on a twenty-four hour basis. Second, vampires can't stand garlic. That means they could never serve pizza. And finally, they can't see their reflection in a mirror. Come on, get real!"

"Based on my statistical analysis, they don't care for truth, beauty, love, ambition, cats, songs, God, or the color green," said Dire Wolfe.

"I'm pretty sure they don't have a sense of humor either," said Bunker.

"See what's in this book I got, 'The Unhumans,'" said Billy. "'A spirit of untold evil and malignancy which gives a phantom life to the body.' And this: 'It is not human, it is an incarnate fiend.'"

"We must remember that so we don't get sentimental," said Dire Wolfe.

"There must be a way to stop them, like driving a stake through their heart at midnight, only hopefully not so messy or inconvenient," said Billy. He took a swig of his soda and grabbed another slice of pizza. "It could

be the simplest, most obvious thing... if only we could think of it."

"Too bad there aren't reverse body snatchers," mused Bunker. "You know, like you go to bed with a zit and you wake up perfectly normal except the zit is gone."

"Could the aliens deceive you?" asked Angel Dave.

"I'd like to see one come in here and try!" exclaimed Billy.

"No friggin' way," said Bunker.

"Piece of cake," agreed Dire Wolfe. "We're not going to pour our hearts out to some alien and fall into any diabolical trap."

"I'd rather find a bat in my bed than an alien in my chair," said Billy. "Right, Bunker?"

"Uh... is that something I have to decide right now? Is it possible to put that question on the lay-a-way plan while I mull it over?"

"One thing we have on our side is that although they may seem smart, they're all incredibly stupid," said Billy. "And they must have a master."

"A master!" exclaimed Angel Dave.

"Sure," said Billy. "Somebody must be in charge, and it can't be Astor, he's such a little wimpy guy."

"Could it be the Headmaster, Mr. Esty?" asked Angel Dave.

Billy thought for a moment. "Well he did give him a promotion, but I don't think so. I think he's got Mr. Esty snowed, like all the rest of 'em."

"But what can we do?" asked Angel Dave.

There was a moment's pause while Billy thought.

"Lend me your theme book, Angel Dave. I want to show it to Mr. Valentine."

Billy jotted a note, scotch-taped it to the front of the theme book, and slipped it into a manila envelope.

"There! I'll take it to his house tomorrow."

"I feel so much better now that I've told someone," said Angel Dave.

"You came to the right place, little dude," said Dire Wolfe.

"But that doesn't explain why Astor would pick on Angel Dave in the first place," said Bunker.

Billy snapped his fingers. "Yes it does! He was after Angel Dave's money!"

"But I am destitute," said Angel Dave.

"Yes, but that's not what Astor thinks. Look at this!" Billy pulled from out of his locked bottom drawer a copy of the 'National Inquirer' from late summer. "I saved this because of a car article, but the word Calexcio stuck in my head. Look at the cover!"

The boys stared at the newspaper. "TEENAGE KID SOUGHT AS HEIR TO BILLION DOLLAR OIL FORTUNE -- Maybe in Calexcio."

"Wow!" said Dire Wolfe, reading. "'H.L. Hunt hunts for fifteen-year old kid so he can give him \$999,999,999.'"

"If you're worth almost a billion dollars," said Bunker, "you definitely out to be able to buy a pack of cigarettes."

"That explain why Astor took a job in a prep school," said Dire Wolfe. "To meet rich boys."

"Astor wanted to make Angel Dave into an alien and steal his money-- but we'll put a stop to that!" said Billy.

"Bunker, please get us some ginger ales from the windowsill. Let us toast to our success!"

"Ginger ale cans are green! I get it," said Angel Dave. "The aliens hate green. Still, it's only five of us against the universe," said Angel Dave.

"Say, what if we are aliens too? Good aliens, I mean," said Bunker.

"Yeah!" exclaimed Dire Wolfe. "With our laughing eyes, delicate sensibilities, and fair complexions we could be the *ginger aliens*!"

"A toast to the ginger aliens!" laughed Billy. He gave a note and the four boys sang, with great fervor:

"We will not cease from mental fight
Nor shall our swords sleep in our hand
Till we have built Je-ru-sa-lem
In every green and pleasant land."

The four boys guzzled their sodas and from their mouths came extremely loud noises of immense satisfaction.

Two hours later found Bunker and Billy on a reconnaissance mission to the HDT Canteen machine for more ginger ale.

"Did you find the room and deliver the note?" asked Bunker.

"Yeah, it was no problem," replied Billy. "Room 222-- there was actually a snapshot of The Four Freshmen on the door."

"I threw the two empty pizza boxes into the proper container."

"Did you get the sodas?"

"Yep! Right here in the old knapsack."

"I'm parched. Let's stop at the pond and have one right now."

Billy guzzled his soda, but Bunker took his time. "I like to let the ginger ale tingle and drip slowly down my throat like the nectar of the Gods."

They now stood satiated on the ice of the half-frozen school pond.

"This had been a delightful all-nighter so far, don't you agree, Bunker? We formed an army, saved a lost boy, and I wrote my theme. Not bad for one night. The evening's young..."

"Do you really think that kid is a billionaire?" asked Bunker.

"I don't know. Maybe."

"I pity him if he is. At my old school I was in the annual Christmas pageant, and I got to sing 'Poor Little Rich Guy' this song about Hartley Harrington Hughes the third. When I hit that last high note, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. The Naugatuck Neighbor drama critic said my performance changed the course of western civilization. They were gonna give the part to this other kid Conny Molotov, but I prayed real hard and he slipped on an ice cube while he was mixing his alcoholic father a highball and permanently lost his voice."

"That's a beautiful Christmas story."

"I had this huge crush on the director, she was the Headmaster's wife Christine. If you were really good and got on the honor roll, she'd let you go into her apartment and watch her watching the World Series. And if you were super good, she'd invite you to their summer camp they had on the Cape for two months! See the full moon? When I was at camp on the beach, me and this girl, we told time by the moon," said Bunker.

"Was your old school co-ed?" asked Billy.

"Nope."

"Mine neither. Hey, speaking of co-eds, I have more news about the faculty brats that we worship from afar!"

"Didi Dodge and Plunkie Plymouth?"

"I was backstage helping Dykes and it was yesterday after the rehearsal. I was standing on top of the piano garage sort of in the shadows and they came into the prop room but they didn't see me."

"They didn't see you?"

"I froze like a statue." Billy froze like a statue to show Bunker what he meant. "They thought they were all alone!"

"Alone!"

"And then, do you know what they did?"

"What?" asked Bunker breathlessly.

"They lit up! They started smoking!"

"No!"

"Yes! The way girls smoke, it's too much! Super sexy! They just inhale, right, and then they hold it in, and then, when you least expect it-- they exhale!"

"I wish I could have been there to see it."

"It was cruel in a way, because I don't think faculty brats are subject to the smoking rules. In fact, since they aren't boys or students, I don't think they're subject to any rules!"

"What a life!" exclaimed Bunker.

"I was all ready to jump down and join them in a cigarette when they disappeared."

"How did they look up close?"

"Scrumptious and delectable," replied Billy.

"Have you ever talked to them?"

"They don't know me from The Atom."

"Me neither. I wish they were here right now," said Bunker. "Introductions could be made. I wouldn't stand on ceremony."

"Maybe I can do something about that," said Billy. "Remember when we were talking about the universe and we decided it was impossible that we exist?"

"Please! Don't remind me," said Bunker. "After your last lecture, I had to take two of my mom's tranquilizers."

"That was the topic of my theme I wrote tonight."

"What was?"

"Heaven. In my theme, you and I were just standing here, like we are now, and you had just said, 'I wish they were here right now,' and I revealed to you-- in a way at once crystal clear and vague-- that I had magic powers and maybe I could make that happen. And you said, 'Well, so why not try it now?'"

"Try what?" said Billy.

"What do you mean, 'what?'" said Bunker. "Cut the mustard, dude, and make with the chicks!"

"Wouldn't it be funny if it worked?" Billy put his palms together, crossed his fingers, and chanted, "Balzac, Bozak, Altec, Muntz, make them chicks appear at once!"

There was a sudden cacophony of bird cries, a serious harp glissando, and then from out of nowhere the sound of faculty brat laughter.

"Did you hear that?" asked Bunker. Suddenly, Didi Dodge and Plunkie Plymouth came skating into sight. Both girls were modeling skating skirts of the sort that had driven Holden Caulfield to the mad house.

"I never dreamed their skating togs would be so-- perfunctory," whispered Billy.

"I did!" quipped Bunker, and before the boys knew it, the girls were all over them.

"Oh my God, it's them!" screamed Plunkie Plymouth, racing across the pond like Sonja Henie on wheels.

"They are boys of uncommon beauty, beardless and callow!" screamed Didi Dodge, as she tore up the ice to get near them. "And they're always laughing! Oh, golly but what we are smitten!"

"Two blue-eyed mids and not a single zit between them!" purred Plunkie Plymouth, as she figure-eighted her quarry. "They bounce when they walk in time to their inside music!"

"But they're as different as night and day!" sighed Didi Dodge as she pulled up alongside the threesome.

"You don't even know us!" exclaimed Billy.

"Au contraire," retorted Plunkie Plymouth in the perfect French that her father hadn't taught her. "We think about you all the time. Didi's daddy says you were the best biology student he ever had."

"And you, Bunker Babcock from Waterbury," gurgled Didi Dodge, "I watched you playing tennis and eating cheeseburgers all summer at the club, and now you're mine, all mine!"

"My Billy looks like a Teutonic titan in his shocking khaki and soothing denim, a five foot seven drink of western water without his cowboy boots," said Plunkie Plymouth, tousling the boy's hair. "And he sleeps with his boots on, so he's got those two extra inches at night-- when and if, if you catch my drift!"

"My Bunker is of Scottish royalty and is less tall," said Didi Dodge, sidling close to Bunker. "And that's the way I like it. So firm, so round, so fully packed, so free and easy on the draw."

"Billy is sly and foxy with a pointed muzzle and a bushy tail," said Plunkie Plymouth. "How many other mids can swagger and smirk at the same time?"

"Bunker looks like the cat that swallowed the canary!"

"Billy's so darned cocksure he can wear an ID bracelet. Plus he wears his pants too short to make him look taller."

"Bunker's got the best grades in the school, and he sleeps with a koala bear doll under his pillow..." growled Didi playfully.

"Don't hurt him!" blurted Bunker involuntarily.

"...but a single glance will prove that he's all man!"

"By the way, what are you ladies doing here-- on the pond?" asked Billy.

"We were ice-diving and we got frustrated," replied Didi Dodge. "You know what I mean?"

"We got so frustrated that we were going to run away and join a Housatonic hockey cult," explained Plunkie Plymouth. "But we couldn't meet the eligibility requirements because we're virgins."

"That's when we thought of you!" added Didi Dodge.

"We want to invite you to the Flaming Pumpkins Ball at my grandmother's house next Friday night, on Halloween."

"My dad fixed it up so you get free passes and it's perfectly legal."

"Be there or be square."

"Your grandmother's house? Where is it?" asked Bunker.

"Over the river..." said Didi Dodge, sensually.

"And through the woods," said Plunkie Plymouth, sensuously.

Just then, there was a loud clap of thunder.

"Oh help me, Bunker, I'm so scared!" exclaimed Didi Dodge, as she jumped into his arms.

"Me, too, Billy. Hold me tight!" said Plunkie Plymouth, as she threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh Bunker! Are your eyes truly blue?" asked Didi Dodge.

"I think so."

"You think so?"

"I'm color blind."

"Oh my sweet Bunker, please let me be your seeing eye animal."

"Hey, I hear music! It's throbbing in my brain!" exclaimed Bunker.

"Bus Stop," replied Didi Dodge. "It's our favorite song!"

"Oh, Billy," said Plunkie Plymouth, "you are so... irrepressible. Let's the four of us romp through Elysian fields together!"

A warm September rain began to fall.

"A warm September rain in October, yeah!" said Billy.

"Nice touch," said Bunker, as the rain increased in intensity.

The two couples locked lips as if there was no tomorrow.

Just as Bunker panted "Oh my God" for the third time, the knapsack containing ten pounds of canned ginger ale slipped off his shoulder and smacked the ice with a sharp crack.

"Yeooooooooow!" screamed Plunkie Plymouth. "Aiyeeeeeeee!" screamed Didi Dodge.

Across the pond flashed a blinding bolt of lightning, and an ear-splitting clap of thunder shook the ivy-covered buildings and, like a gigantic windshield, the entire ice cover cracked, shattered, and sunk with such force that the boys were hurled to the shore and landed flat on their backs.

"Bunker, grab the sodas, for Heaven's sake!" yelled Billy.

The girls disappeared along with the ice.

"That was an incredibly realistic theme!" puffed Bunker. "Man, what I wouldn't give for a cigarette right about now!"

Billy stood up and stretched. "Another fine adventure..."

Bunker stood up, grabbed his knapsack, and hit a note.

"Over the river, and through the woods
To Grandmother's house away!
We would not stop for doll or top
For 'tis Thanksgiving Day."

"Ye-hi!" yelled Billy as he raced to Congdon House.

"Sssssh!" Bunker cautioned, close behind him. "Do you want to wake up the whole school?"

"No, just half of it!" laughed Billy. "Hey look, there's a light on in Jeff Lord's room up on the third floor!"

Billy picked up a pebble and lobbed it, hitting Lord's window glass, with a loud click.

"Damn, a bull's-eye!" exclaimed Bunker.

A second later, the window opened and Jeff Lord peered out.

"Hey, Jeff Lord!" yelled Billy sotto voce. "Can we come up?"

Jeff Lord put his finger to his lips to indicate silence, then beckoned the boys to come upstairs.

The boys began to run up the side stairs to Congdon when Billy stopped short.

"Holy Bone! Do you see that car, Bunker?"

Parked right behind Congdon House was a sleek, low-slung, green futuristic sports car, brand new. Billy ran down the stairs, over to the car, and began to fondle it.

"The engine's still warm!"

"What is it?" asked Bunker.

"It's a 1969 Avenger! With a Corvair engine I bet! It can do a hundred-and-forty miles an hour! I saw a demonstrator in a car show with Golfsticks, but I've never been able to touch one. And it's parked right next to our dorm! Whose is it?"

"There's a Dartmouth decal," said Bunker.

"It said in 'Car and Driver' that this kid in Massachusetts just won one of these! And he's fifteen like us. He won it and he can't even drive it! Why couldn't that be me?"

"I'm sure you couldn't drive it much better than he couldn't," volunteered Bunker.

"You know, when I go home for Christmas I'll be able to drive my mom's station wagon like a Goddamn bastard!" exclaimed Billy. "But I probably won't be allowed to drive my dad's Mercedes."

"When I turn sixteen next April," said Bunker, "my dad has already picked out for me five cars I won't be allowed to drive: his Cadillac, his Pontiac, his Jaguar, his Corvette, and his jeep."

The boys bounded up the steps, then swiftly climbed the interior stair to their room where Billy tapped the code knock softly on their door. Receiving no reply, they entered the room and switched on the desk light.

"Dire Wolfe and Angel Dave are gone!" said Billy.

"But they left a note!" said Bunker. "'We tried to catch some Z's, but tossed and turned because we were too keyed up, so we've gone to the golf course. See you soon. Very truly yours, the ginger aliens.'"

"Dire Wolfe sure prints nice," said Billy.

The boys hung up their winter coats, stashed their sodas in the windowsill icebox, and proceeded to their mirrors to freshen up.

"I had a zit this morning and now it's completely gone," said Bunker, gazing at his face in the looking glass.

"Likewise!" said Billy. "It must be the pond water."

"Hey, did you draw this?" asked Bunker, looking at a magic marker drawing on Billy's desk. "This is really good! It's the four of us, but with halos. When did you get to be such a good drawer? You really improved over the summer!"

"Yeah, I spent the summer creatin' when I should have been datin'-- 'cause I couldn't find a girlfriend."

"That could be in a museum, except that my halo is bent. Who is this one?"

"That's Mr. Orlop. Don't you recognize him? He's the master in John Galt's newspaper he called 'Domino Orlopsky, head of the TSP-- Taft Secret Police.' That's why I drew swastikas and scars all over his face."

"Hope I never meet him. He's perfect for the dart board, however. May I?"

"Be my guest!" Bunker taped the drawing to the dart board on the back of the door. "How come you didn't draw

Master Astor? He would be even perfecter for throwing darts into."

"You know what? I tried, but I just couldn't. I couldn't stand to look him in the eye, even in my head. Drawing him is like an advertisement for evil. Yuk!"

"Wow, what is this?" asked Bunker, reading. "'The Nine Lives of Paul McCartney.' When did you draw these?"

"My theme didn't take long to write, and I didn't want to interrupt you guys listening to music, so I just started drawing."

"These are friggin' hilarious!" exclaimed Bunker, as he turned the pages.

"Well, everybody was sayin' 'Paul McCartney's dead' or 'Paul McCartney's alive' but no one was actually talking about how he died. So I attacked the subject, so to speak."

"You really know how to draw! Take me through it, please, Billy!"

"Well, the first one is Paul was riding his scooter and hits a dog."

"Now number two is he was run over by a car on Abbey Road right as they took the picture on the album. Down here, you can see the blood splatter."

"I would have known that was brain splatter even if you hadn't labeled it!"

"Number three here," continued Billy, "he's run over by a Yellow Submarine and drowns. Number four, he's run over by the Oscar Meyer Weinermobile."

"Seems like he gets run over a lot," said Bunker.

"Wait!" said Billy. "Number five, he's electrocuted by his own microphone."

"Number six, he flies too close to the sun and his horse's wings melt. Number seven, he crashes in an elevator. If you look up top, you can see John Lennon cutting the cables with an axe."

"Nice touch!" laughed Bunker.

"Now in number eight, he gets bitten by a black-mouth boomslang spitting cobra while eating a fish filet at McDonald's.

"And for the grand finale, number nine, he falls through a hole and his mind explodes."

"But he doesn't look dead at all," said Bunker. "He's just lying there like he's asleep."

"I know!" said Billy. "That's the cool part. That's why people think he's still alive."

"But people don't think he's still alive. They think he's dead."

"Same difference."

"Can we take them upstairs and show them off?"

"You make me blush like a cheap prostitute."

"You are a really good artist, now, and fast, too! Why do you keep it a secret?"

"I prefer to keep my light under a barrel."

"Huh? What's that from?"

"The friggin' Bible, you Catholic doofus!"

Bunker laughed and grabbed the sketch pad and the boys ran upstairs.

Compared to Bunker and Billy's room, Jeff Lord's triple on the third floor was dark and cramped. WDRC was playing softly on their compact portable radio as

freckle-faced beach boy Jeff Lord ushered the boys in, talking at fifty miles per hour as usual.

"Number nine, number nine, number nine," he chanted.

"Did you guys listen to the Paul McCartney show on WDRC?" asked Billy.

"Three hours of it," replied the perpetually happy left-handed Kelly Green.

"We had a visit from a mysterious stranger and missed the show," said Bunker. "So what's the story? Is Paul alive or dead?"

"They had John Lennon call in and he said the whole thing was a joke," said Jeff Lord.

"Yeah," said Kelly. "He said if Paul was dead, he would have told us. He said we'd be the first to know."

"Well that's good news," said Billy, "although I will kind of miss the suspense."

"Check out Billy's pictures!" exclaimed Bunker. "They are absolutely fantastic!" he raved. "Everybody's been talking about was whether Paul was dead or not. No one asked how he died-- except Picasso here!"

Billy swelled with pride as Jeff and Kelly gathered around.

"There are nine lives," explained Bunker. "See, the first one is Paul hits a dog while he's riding his scooter."

"Aw, that's lame," said Jeff Lord. "Who would ever believe that?" He studied the drawing. "Good drawing though. Paul sure looks surprised."

After all nine lives had been displayed and well-received, Kelly exclaimed, "This stuff should be in the freakin' Frick!"

"How come you guys are still up?" asked Billy. "And where is Jack Frost?"

"Asleep on the top bunk," replied Jeff Lord.

"Then who's that...?" asked Bunker, but he stopped short when he spied a man sitting at the desk of Jack Frost.

"Hey, sorry, we didn't know you guys had company," said Bunker, nudging Billy and instinctively stuffing the sketchbook down the back of his trousers.

Billy rapidly removed from his breast pocket a pair of eyeglasses and put them on, staring at the stranger as if he was blind.

"Please sir, pardon and please accept our apologies for our intrusion at this very late hour, but my study partner Bunker and me were taking a much needed break from our all-nighter academic symposium which we pulled because..."

"Because we both had a tremendous amount of work to do," continued Bunker.

"One might say we were incapacitated by overwork..."

"Knock it off, guys," said Kelly. He's not really an adult, he's Perry Ferry, former head monitor. We ran into him in the corridor and invited him in for a bull session. Perry, this is Bunker and Billy."

"Head monitor!" exclaimed Billy. Ferry stood up and walked over. Even though he wasn't that tall, the boys could tell he wasn't a kid because he had a faint trace of blonde stubble on his chin.

"I was head monitor, past tense, but I graduated two years before you started. Now, I'm down from Dartmouth staying over with a master," explained Perry Ferry.

"Dartmouth! Is that your Avenger downstairs?" asked Billy excitedly, removing his disguise.

"Actually, it's my father's car," replied Ferry.

"It's fantastic! Does it have a Corvair engine? Can it really do one-hundred-and-forty on the highway? I've read all about it in 'Car and Driver.' And about how the inventor Mr. Goodwin last year accidentally shot this guy who was kissing his wife in his house and then he got sent to jail and then he died and they had a forty-five car funeral..."

Bunker knew there was no stopping Billy once he switched to automotive mode, so he took the opportunity to pull Jeff Lord away from the crowd and hold a whispered conversation. A minute later, Kelly Green brought the festivities to an end.

"Hey guys, I hate to be inhospitable, but I gotta hit the hay," said Kelly. "And Jeff here needs his beauty sleep."

"Oh yes, of course, no problem," said Perry Ferry politely.

"You want to come down to our room?" asked Billy all of a sudden. "We're open all night. And I have a great Avenger pinup I can show you!"

"Are you sure I wouldn't be imposing?"

"Oh, they can entertain you!" promised Jeff Lord as he pushed the trio out the door and into the corridor. He pointed down the steps and said to Perry Ferry, "See those scuff marks? That's where Billy skateboarded down these stairs."

Perry Ferry's eyes lit with a dull glimmer.

"You were skateboarding in the dorm?" he asked a bit too eagerly. "You actually skated down those steps?"

"You jump them," answered Billy, "and land on your board, hopefully."

"Are you on any teams?"

"Me and Billy are just on club soccer this term," said Bunker, "but last spring he was a pole vaulter. And a goalie last winter, club A League."

Perry Ferry turned his gaze to Bunker.

"Don't you play tennis at the Country Club of Waterbury? What's your name again?"

"Bunker Bocock from Waterbury, serial number 008."

"I thought you looked familiar. My father is the club president."

"Oh, how grand," said Bunker.

The boys descended the stairs and invited the ex-head monitor into their room.

"Welcome to our humble abode," said Billy, removing the poster from the shipping tube. "Here's the pinup! If you look way past the girl in the white bikini, you can see your car."

"The photographic clarity is startling," said Bunker, as he flicked on the portable radio.

Perry began inspecting the room, passing by the many psychedelic posters to stop at a framed photograph. "Say, who is this?"

"That's Julie Nixon, the president's daughter!" replied Bunker. "Billy wrote her and got her autograph. He's a Republican."

"But I've would date Democratic chicks in a heartbeat," cried Billy. "My dad says, 'Politics should never stand in the way of true love.'"

"So Waldron is your last name?" asked Perry.

"Yep. Say, would you like a ginger ale? Ice cold!" offered Billy. "Or some leftover pizza? It's only a few hours old."

Perry Ferry settled down into the recliner.

"What I'd really like is a cigarette, if that's OK with you guys." He withdrew from his dress shirt pocket a fresh pack of Winstons and a monogrammed Zippo lighter.

"Zippo!" said the very surprised Bunker Boccock. "We've got cross-ventilation!" he added in keen anticipation, as he began to open the windows.

"Bunker, Perry doesn't need cross-ventilation-- he's legal."

"Oh, yeah."

"Do you fellows have an ashtray?" asked Perry Ferry.

"Just a souvenir from the Dork Club," laughed Billy.

Bunker moved close to Billy. "Let me show you where I put the ashtray," nudging Billy hard.

"Make yourself at home," said Billy, "while we locate that darned elusive ashtray."

Bunker dragged Billy to the back corner of the room and started rifling drawers.

"Why are you acting so weird?" whispered Billy.

"Here's why!" grinned Bunker, furtively removing a crumpled Marlboro pack from his sleeve.

"Where did you get those?" asked Billy excitedly.

"From Jeff Lord while you were yakking about your Avenger."

"Fantastic!"

"I was thinking if that monitor guy gets the smell thing going..." said Bunker. "It's a golden opportunity," he added.

Billy's eyes lit up with admiration. "Alice, you're the greatest!" Billy looked out into space. "It's all we ever dreamed of-- smoking in our own room." He removed a cigarette from the pack and stuck it behind his ear.

"We're in the midst of an adventure!" said Bunker, and he slammed the drawer shut for emphasis. They hustled back with the ashtray.

"We found your ashtray, Mr. Monitor," offered Bunker.

Perry Ferry lit up manfully as the boys looked on in adulation. Slowly exhaling, Perry said, "There is nothing better than a good smoke."

"Don't mind if I join you," replied Billy casually, lighting the battered Marlboro with a kitchen match he struck off the sole of his boot. He took a drag and exhaled.

"It's a wonderful life."

Billy handed the cigarette to Bunker who took a deep drag and emitted a perfect smoke ring.

"Will you look at those smoke rings, folks? Bunker is like a professional ring blower, and he's only been smoking for two summers!"

Bunker handed the cigarette back to Billy who took a nice, slow drag. The boys continued to savor their Marlboro with great pleasure.

"Why do you open the windows but leave the curtains closed?" asked Perry Ferry. "Doesn't that defeat the purpose?"

"Because of John Galt," answered Billy, exhaling. "He was this kid who published the 'Verboten Weekly' and well-respected, good looks, athlete, got expelled through the window..."

"Hold up, wait a minute, slow down. Now, who is John Galt?" asked Perry Ferry.

The boys crinkled their faces and stole a glance at one another.

"Well, John Galt wasn't his real name, that's just what he was called, he was just this kid who put out an underground newspaper..."

"The 'Verboten Weekly'..." inserted Bunker.

"...and he was just taking a nice smoke before Vespers last winter, when this Master caught him. The Master who lived in the fourth floor above Bingham Auditorium was looking out of his window and saw all the way across the courtyard into John Galt's window and he turned him in."

"A hundred and thirty-seven feet away," said Bunker.

"And because John Galt forgot to close the curtains, he got expelled," finished Billy.

Bunker and Perry Ferry stubbed out their cigarettes in the ashtray at the same time.

"Who was the master?" asked Perry Ferry.

"Oh, you don't know him," said Billy. "He just started last year. That's what made it worse. He just started and John Galt was in his third year."

Ferry abruptly stood up and walked over to Billy's Tandberg reel-to-reel tape deck. "I can't believe that mids like you get to have seven hundred dollar hi-fi systems when we weren't allowed even a fourteen dollar radio."

"Oh, I've got a fourteen dollar radio!" grinned Bunker, as he turned it up a notch.

"This is progressive rock in stereo, WHCN-FM, Hartford, Connecticut, 105.9 on your dial, signing off. The time is 3AM."

"Ye Gods!" exclaimed Perry Ferry. "3AM? It's way past my bedtime. Thanks for your hospitality," and he was out the door. The boys stood facing each other.

"Ye Gods! There went the head monitor," laughed Bunker. "Man, that first cigarette high! I almost fainted!"

"Do you know what just happened?" asked Billy. "We finally got to smoke an entire cigarette in our own friggin' room! And a visitation from an ex-head mon!"

"Yeah! A momentous evening!" said Bunker. "How come you didn't tell him Master Astor's name?"

"I don't know. I just didn't feel like it."

"How about we take a long walk and finish this pack?" suggested Bunker. "I feel like getting away from this place. Maybe doing some singing."

"How many cigarettes left?" asked Billy.

"Two!" replied Bunker. "But we should save one for Angel Dave, so that leave use one."

"Great!" said Billy. "If we share, it will last a long time..."

"Until we breakfast ourselves downtown at Mike's..." said Bunker.

"Formerly Phillip's Pie Shop..." said Billy.

"At 6AM!" said both.

As the boys donned their winter coats, Billy turned to Bunker.

"Hey you know what we forgot to do tonight?" he asked, as they walked out the door.

"What?" asked Bunker.

"Take a NoDoz! This is the best all-nighter so far ever!"

"We two kings of orient are..."

At precisely 1PM the next day, the boys were awakened by a peremptory pounding on their door, ruining what had been an extremely productive sleep.

The door swung open so hard it slammed against the wall, and a deep booming voice said, "Bocock! Waldron! Get out of those beds."

Bunker jumped to attention, for standing before him was none other than the man in Billy's drawing, dreaded master Dick Orlop of the Taft Secret Police.

Simultaneously, Billy leaped down from the top bunk, landing squarely on his drawing of Mister Orlop which had been blown off the dart board by the shock.

"Attention!" bellowed Orlop. "Eyes straight ahead!"

The boys suddenly felt very small, clad in exactly nothing but their Fruits of the Loom. In his three-piece woolen suit, Dick Orlop towered above the fifteen-year-old boys.

"Waldron!"

"Yes, sir."

"Bocock!"

"Yes, sir."

"You are to report to Dean Oscarson's office in twenty-three minutes properly dressed," he scowled, "for an emergency Sunday hearing before the headmaster and the disciplinary committee."

"B-b-b-but, please sir-- why?" Bunker stuttered. Both the boys assiduously avoided eye contact with the master, who was sniffing the air.

"You have been turned in for smoking cigarettes in this very room-- by the former head monitor!"

Orlop looked the boys up and down, his eyes darkened in disgust. "You are a negative people cohort," he spat

out, "with a marked failure in conduct." He turned and departed, slamming the door behind him.

The boys stared at each other in open-mouthed amazement.

"Yow! My feet are burning," said Billy. "Look what I'm standing on!" Billy bent down to retrieve the drawing.

"An Orlop at the door rates an Orlopsy on the floor!" quipped Bunker, and they both broke into gales of laughter.

"We shouldn't be laughing," said Billy, as he tossed the drawing onto his desk. "We are a negative people cohort... with a marked failure in conduct."

"And to top it off, we missed lunch!" cried Bunker. "I think he heard my stomach growling! We're not even entitled to a last meal before our execution."

"That bastard Perry Ferry!" sputtered Billy. "That son of a bitch! That son of a bitch bastard!"

"No wonder he wanted to know our last names," said Bunker.

"I should have known when he told me he never drove his Aztec Avenger with a Corvair engine over forty miles an hour. Oh, what a waste of car!" moaned Billy.

"To think we trusted that guy," said Bunker. "And he turned out to be an... alumni alien!"

"Oh my God!" said Billy, slapping his forehead. "You're right! And I let him into our room! That space alien touched Julie Nixon! And I even offered him a ginger ale! It's all my fault!"

"No!" replied Bunker. "It was as much my fault as yours. No one forced me to smoke. And I provided the cigarette."

"We were fools together." Billy put his hand over his heart. "We're equal martyrs at the altar of the all-nighter theme writers."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Bunker. "We told him all about John Galt! They expelled John Galt for smoking-- what will they do to us?"

"Got it right here," offered Dire Wolfe helpfully. The boys spun around to find Dire Wolfe and Angel Dave curled up in the recliner under a beach towel.

"Christ Almighty! You scared the bejesus out of us!" said Billy. "Thank God Orlop didn't see you guys!"

"Where did you come from?" asked Bunker.

"Me and little dude got back from our walk about five," said Dire Wolfe, "but you weren't here and I guess we just passed out. What the flying bill hades did we miss?"

The boys hastily related their meeting with Ferry, and Billy explained where they had procured the fatal faggot.

"Jeff Lord gave us three, we smoked two, and we saved one for you Angel Dave, and here it is, if you promise not to start weeping out of gratitude."

"What can they do to us, Dire Wolfe?" asked Bunker.

Dire Wolfe the rule stickler read from his tattered Student Handbook.

"Page twenty-four. 'The first violation of the smoking rule is punishable by a D in conduct and assignment to the penalty crew for a period of six weeks. Subsequent violations of the rule are to be considered grounds for dismissal.'"

"And we just got off of bounds," said Billy. "Today was our first Sunday with no penalty crew since September."

Dire Wolfe continued: "Page thirty-five. 'D and E in conduct void all types of permissions and weekends except a two hour permission with one's family.'"

"Oh joy!" said Bunker.

"And about monitors it says, ``Monitors are boys who have shown special qualities of leadership and high character. The older boys have shown in a conspicuous way a spirit of helpfulness toward the younger ones."

"Wow!" said Bunker. "With monitors like that, who needs enemies?"

"Let's consult with Dykes," said Billy. "He'll know what to do! He's considered an expert in such matters."

The boys exploded into action, throwing on their regulation trousers, loafers, dress shirts, coats and ties.

"Hey guys!" Bunker said to Dire Wolfe and Angel Dave. "Please clean up this room while we're gone."

"Clear away all these incriminating sketches!" added Billy. "Our lives may be at stake!"

"Empty the ashtray far away-- like across the road," said Bunker.

"And while you're across the road, take Angel Dave's theme book over to Mr. Valentine's house. You know which one is his house?"

"Yeah, across from the tower." Billy handed Dire Wolfe the manila envelope.

"Tell him it's urgent and it's from me."

"And be inconspicuous in your helpfulness!" said Bunker.

Billy went to his desk and scrawled a note on the back of the Avenger pinup.

"What are you writing?" asked Bunker.

"To Jeff, Jack & Kelly: Perry Ferry smoked a cig in our room last night and we had one too. Mr. Orlop just busted into our room and told us Ferry turned us in and we have to go see Oscie STAT. First we are consulting

with Dykes-- any questions, ask him! --Billy and Bunker.'"

They had barely got out into the hallway when they ran smack into little Grantby Manners, "BLIND FAITH" in the shape of a cross freshly lettered on his chest in magic marker.

"Someone's been sleeping in my bed!" he exclaimed angrily.

"I beg your pardon?" said Bunker.

"You heard me. Is Wolfe in your room?"

"The big, bad wolf?" asked Bunker.

"DIRE Wolfe, you freak! My roommate!"

"Oh, that Wolfe! I think he's up in Jeff Lord's room," said Billy. "And while you're up there, give Jeff Lord this pinup, pretty please!"

The second Manners was gone, the door opened again, and Angel Dave and Dire Wolfe poked his heads through, one above the other, like in the movies.

"Take the back way guys!" whispered Dire Wolfe. "Under the kitchen and through the cellars! Be inconspicuous!"

"Perry Ferry ought to be electrocuted," added Angel Dave.

Through the dark and dingy basements of Taft the boys hurtled a tenth of a mile, their neckties flapping in the breeze, until they reached the trap room beneath the Bingham stage where they climbed the circular stair leading up to stage left.

The vast Bingham stage was clear of scenery and bathed in green light, empty except for a few stage crew stalwarts and the sounds of WDRC-FM blasting over the sound system.

"Bus stop!" panted Bunker.

"Bus stop!" panted Billy.

They spied the senior in charge of the stage, the amusing and cynical Tommy Dykes at the Frankensteinian lighting switchboard, manipulating one of the giant levers.

"Tommy! Tommy!" they exclaimed breathlessly, as they ran up to him. Dykes hit the music mute switch.

"That's the name-- say it, don't spray it," he replied in his languorous Southern accent. "Did you come to paint scenery or just to utilize the crying towel? And why are you dressed for high mass?"

Merely being in his presence calmed the boys as Dykes proved once again that he was indispensable.

"We need your help bad!" said Billy.

"And we only have seven minutes before we have to meet with Oscie!" said Bunker.

"Tell me all about it and tell it fast," said Dykes.

"Well, we were in the middle of this excellent all-nighter when we met this kid Perry Ferry..." said Billy, and he and Bunker recounted the tumultuous events of the past several hours.

"You say Perry Ferry smoked with you and then turned ya'll in?" asked Tommy Dykes, aghast. "I knew Perry Ferry! He was head mon my first year! He was conspicuously helpful to me as a lower mid. But now he's insane?"

The boys nodded in the affirmative.

"And clad only in your underpants, Dick Orlop lectured ya'll up and down?"

"Almost," replied Bunker.

"Why of all the high-handed... that's tantamount to entrapment! He should be fried at the stake and served to the trustees."

"We didn't mention Master Astor's name, though."

Just then, handsome cleft-chinned Jerry Baker-- of the identical Baker twins-- moseyed over to the switchboard.

"If you're talking about Perry Ferry, he's staying up on the fourth floor with Mister Astor."

"No way!" exclaimed Bunker.

"I saw him with my own two eyes just an hour ago. They're as thick as thieves. Happy Astor asked Perry Ferry to go to Divinity School with him."

"Oh no!" shrieked Billy.

"Sheeps! Our goose is cooked but good!" spouted Bunker. "I told you I didn't trust that guy."

"Are you sure, Jerry?" asked Billy. "How many faculty apartments are on the fourth floor above Bingham?"

"One."

"Kee-rist!" moaned Billy.

"Having a head monitor involved to them is like a cop killing!" said Dykes.

"What can we do, Dykes?"

"Whatever we do, it needs to be quick and dirty. First we need to get rid of the evidence. Let me smell your breath!"

The boys breathed at Dykes.

"Jeez Louise! You need some purifier," said Dykes. "Let's retire to the slop sink." The hustled over to the sink in the stage right wing next to the piano garage.

"Right where we are standing is where them faculty brats were smoking!" whispered Billy to Bunker. "That's where I was frozen, up there." Billy froze like a statue to show Bunker what he meant.

"Sacred grounds..." replied Bunker.

"Here, gentlemen, gargle with this Listerine-- three times."

As Billy was admiring himself in the paint-splattered mirror, Dykes asked, "What's this in your back pocket, Billy?"

"The latest issue of 'Car and Driver'! I thought I might catch up on my reading. Check out the cover-- 1970 cars, the Challenger, Monet Carlo, Duster, Torino..."

"He's a subscriber," noted Bunker proudly.

"Hemicuda, Cyclone Spoiler... it's even got a fold-out!"

"Holy smokes!" said Dykes. "You can't be looking at dirty pictures of automobiles in an official meeting! Leave that here with me, and don't worry, I'll take good care of it. You need to act academic as hell and take some real books. Let's see what we got here in the John Spafford Memorial Barrel."

"What's the Spafford Barrel?" asked Billy.

"It's from dear departed John Spafford who did not return to school this year. They just brought it to me yesterday with this note: 'In furtherance of the dramatic arts at Taft I hereby donate to the Masque and Dagger Society all of my unearthly possessions.'"

"Jeez, that's touching," said Bunker.

"Bunker, you take his theme book. You've got to look like you don't want to miss a second studying!"

Bunker read the cover of the book out loud and then peeked inside: "'Themes I Never Wrote by John Spafford.' It's all blank pages."

"Billy, you take this Latin II book. It's perfect, since Oscie's a Latin master."

"Latin-- yuk!" said Bunker. "I had to take Latin in my old school until I got a comment that said, 'Mr. Bocock doesn't deign to do his Latin work; he prefers to play the pixie.'"

"That school made you into a damned good pixie," said Billy with admiration.

"You guys have writing implements?" asked Dykes.

"Yep!" replied Billy.

"OK-- you got three minutes left to get there! Break a leg!"

The boys broke into a run across the stage.

"Wait! Don't run," said Dykes. "Saunter! Act cool and casual!"

"Thanks, Dykes!"

"And if you two make it out of this mess with your asses intact, I may have a little job for you!"

"Super!" said Billy.

Coolly and casually the boys sauntered out through the auditorium and into the majestic double-height collegiate gothic corridor accentuated with huge arched leaded glass windows.

"Hey, this guy Spafford was pretty witty," said Billy, peeking into the Latin text. As they rounded the corner, Billy declaimed loudly in the echoey corridor:

"'Latin is a dead language as dead as it can be. It killed off all the Romans and now it's killing'-- Oh, hi, Mr. Oscarson," said Billy, as he walked directly into the large stomach belonging to the Dean of Students.

"Mr. Waldron!"

"Yes, sir!" said Billy.

"Mr. Bocock!"

"Present!" said Bunker.

Both boys exhaled as much Listerine in the Dean's direction as they politely could, as the three stood alone on Nicotine Boulevard.

"You gentlemen make yourselves comfortable in the Harley Roberts room. I'm glad you brought your study materials because the proceedings, to which you are cordially not invited, should not take more than five or six hours."

"And just to refresh your memories, here are copies of your conduct slips-- a complete history of your offenses from your first day at Taft."

Glumly, the boys headed to the door. "Oh, and one other thing," said Oscie.

"Straighten your ties."

The Dean of Students propelled the boys inside and closed the heavy door behind them.

Unlike spacious oak-finished Bingham Auditorium, the low-ceilinged Roberts room was dark and claustrophobic, with chestnut paneling and oiled floors, only partially brightened by oriental rugs. Flowered waiting room furniture filled the place.

"Jesus Christ, it must be a hundred and ten degrees in here!" exclaimed Billy, as he strode over to the windows. "There are radiators in the window seats going full blast plus there's a roaring fire!" He stripped off his sports coat and loosened his tie.

"They must be planning to give us the third degree," said Bunker nervously, wiping the fog off his glasses. "You know, sweat the truth out of us."

"What truth? That we smoked half a cigarette each?" He looked around. "Jeez, this is a depressing place."

"The only saving grace is that it smells like smoke," said Bunker, inhaling deeply.

"Don't you see the irony, Bunker? Cheating is always illegal, stealing is always illegal, and smoking is always illegal until you're a senior and then BANG! suddenly it's legal! It's like they're teasing us into our young manhood."

"And here we face our ironic inquisition on Nicotine Boulevard..."

"Look out the window, Bunker! There goes Jeff Lord, Jack Frost and Kelly Green. They're on their way downtown to have some fun I'll bet, and we're not with them..." The boys tapped like mad on the delicate glass and waved.

"They don't even see us," said Bunker, as the boys gave up. "I feel like we're in the phantom zone in Superman comics."

"It's deadly quiet in here," said Billy after a second.

"What do you expect on a Sunday afternoon in the phantom zone?"

"We might as well look over this junk Oscie gave us since we got six hours to kill," said Billy. He pulled up a chair to one of the little tables and Bunker joined him.

Billy read off his list: "William Waldron: skateboarding in the dormitory, sun bathing on the HDT roof, bare torso on the JV soccer field, late for Vespers, possession of a hunting knife, sitting on the front fence, reading other than texts in study hall, use of the Art Room on Saturday, overdue library book, violation of library procedure, and kissing for public display."

"Who were you kissing for public display?"

"This townie up at Sperry's Orchard named Dawn. We were starting to make out, but before I could even get my bearings, the apple tractor which concealed us drove away unexpectedly and exposed us indecently."

"Aw shoot, that could happen to anybody."

"Now read me your list."

"Bunker Bocock: late for Vespers, illegal tennis garb, illegal permission to Waterbury, use of the Jigger shop while on bounds, late for penalty crew, refusal to beautify the school grounds..."

"Huh?"

"That was when Oscie told us to water the flowers in the rain-- late for church, unseemly conduct in the common room, wearing Bermuda shorts downtown on a Sunday, talking in study hall, communicating without talking in study hall, taking ice cream to a boy in the infirmary, use of library window as a door, and kissing after only a short and casual acquaintance."

"Wow! Who were you kissing?"

"It was the dance at Wykeham Rise in Fishampton. I was thinking of Didi Dodge but it turned out I was kissing Buffy Puffington."

"Close call, dude!"

"Thank God we've outgrown such infantile behavior!" said Bunker.

"Except kissing."

"Yes, except kissing," agreed Bunker.

"And today they will add smoking to the list. Kissing and smoking-- now that's a record to be proud of."

"You couldn't ask for a better record than that," said Bunker.

"When you think about it, it's incredible what we've achieved in only a little over a year," said Billy, as they put the lists away.

They sit in silence for a moment. Bunker flipped open the Latin book.

"Hey, Billy, listen to what this guy Spafford wrote in his book. 'The annual average temperature in the Harley Roberts inquisition room is a hundred and ten degrees. There are exactly three-hundred and sixty-four window panes and the Latin inscription over the fireplace means the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge.' Jeez, old Spafford has done all our work for us."

"Now I remember that guy John Spafford from Penalty Crew last spring!" exclaimed Billy, taking the book from Bunker. "He was on the honor roll-- and they still kicked him out. Hey, aren't you on the honor roll?"

"On the cusp."

"The cusp?"

"I was born on the cusp of Taurus, my teeth are on the cusp, and now my grades are on the cusp."

"But you said you were on the honor roll..."

"I was-- at my old school, McTernan. That was when I was still a good boy.

"In sixth grade, I was President of my class at Blake," said Billy. "I got letters from the White House and from Lady Churchill's secretary."

"The summer after sixth grade I was a doubles tennis champ at the country club with Dickie Mak-e-peace. When I was a little guy, I helped put up our Christmas lights every year in our neighborhood, Bunker Hill. This one year our house won first place for the baby Jesus which I singlehandedly illuminated."

"At Blake, I won a liberty bell for selling magazines to benefit the many needy people of St Paul."

"When I was a boy soprano, besides singing 'Poor Little Rich Guy,' I played Oliver at McTernan. When I sang 'Who will Buy?' and 'Where is Love?' man, you should have seen

those mothers crying. They had to mop up the tears between performances."

"My last year at Blake I was on the library committee, worked in the bookstore, was in the science club and managed the wrestling team."

"What happened to us?" asked Bunker. "How come good boys turn out so bad?"

"Search me," said Billy. "Maybe it's like our brains run on auto-pilot until we're thirteen and then the real us kicks in and takes over. That's the year I had to repeat eighth grade."

"That's the year I started smoking," said Bunker.

"I was too irrepressible for my own good."

"I played the pixie."

"Now we burn the candle..."

"At both ends..." they said together.

"Have you ever tried drugs?" asked Bunker, in a low voice.

"Nope. But it's only because I couldn't get any."

"Same here," said Bunker.

"I punched my nine-year-old sister in the arm for telling my grandmother I was buying a pipe to smoke grass," said Billy. "She thought I meant grass in the front yard."

"This past summer my mom had to physically remove me from a car which was going to take me to Woodstock," said Bunker.

"I guess we're kindred spirits," said Billy, as they boys shook hands in Masonic fashion. "But in this case, on a scale of one to ten, we're innocent."

"The funny thing is we trusted that guy Perry Ferry and he betrayed us," said Bunker. "I mean, if you can't trust the head monitor, who can you trust?"

"But he's not a head monitor," said Billy. "He's an alien alumni. Isn't he?"

"Try telling that to my dad."

Their reverie was interrupted by a sharp rapping on the delicate window panes.

"It's Dire Wolfe and Angel Dave!" exclaimed Bunker.

"Greetings, Martians!" bubbled Dire Wolfe, as Billy threw open the window.

"We took care of everything as ordered!" said Angel Dave. "Mr. Valentine was home and we gave him the envelope, told him it was from you, and told him urgent!"

"And guess what's right in front of Mr. Valentine's house?" asked Dire Wolfe. "A bus stop!"

"Bus Stop!" exclaimed Billy and Bunker together.

"Also, we destroyed the evidence in your room except we saved the good stuff which we carefully concealed..." said Dire Wolfe.

"And we dumped the ashes into the Annex Pond," continued Angel Dave, "where they vanished without a trace," he added melodramatically.

"We thought you might need some luncheon," said Dire Wolfe as he handed in the leftover pizza box. From their pockets they withdrew ice-cold ginger ales which they passed over to the boys.

"There's a big stack of napkins in the box!"

"You who are about to die, we salute you!" they sang out in unison, saluted, then ran off.

Just as Billy was about to close the window, Dire Wolfe reappeared. "I forgot to give you the salt and pepper," he said, flipping the hair out of his eyes while handing in the condiments.

"I wish you had a sister back home," quipped Billy, "that I could rent for the night."

"Oh, pshaw," blushed Dire Wolfe, Fishampton style, and he dashed off to rejoin Angel Dave.

"Looks like Dire Wolfe has finally found himself a best buddy," said Billy, tearing into the pizza.

"There is no such thing as a really bad boy," added Bunker with his mouth full.

The boys bolted their lunch.

"Man that really hit the spot!" said Bunker.

"Damnation!" cried Billy, looking at his watch. "What am I going to do in here for the next five hours with only a book of Latin?"

"Well, I've got to write my dad," said Bunker.

"Why are you writing your father?"

"Because no matter what they do to us, it's better writing him than telling him in person. Mine is a special case."

"Well, it's just as bad for me as it is for you," said Billy.

"No, it isn't!" explained Bunker. "It's twice as bad for me! First of all, your dad is way out in Wayzata, Minnesota. Mine is at 309 Forest Ridge Road-- ten minutes away."

"Well, what's the worst that your dad can do?"

"He can take away my driver's license, for starters," exploded Bunker.

"Dude, you don't even have a driver's license yet," replied Billy.

"Tell me about it! And then he could make me work at his company as a yard slave all summer long six days a week and there goes any possibility of meeting chicks." Bunker opened the theme book and prepared to write.

"Well, I can't just sit here," said Billy. "I can't stand being still. I'm gonna take some laps."

"Laps?"

"Just walking, I'll tread softly. At least it's a way to let off some steam."

Billy began to circle the room counter-clockwise circles, sweeping as close to the perimeter walls as possible. After he had completed about thirty laps, he heard Bunker chuckling.

"What's so funny?"

"This is," said Bunker, holding up the Latin book. "This guy Spafford is truly entertaining-- and informative."

"I thought you were supposed to be writing your father."

"Yeah, I am, but when I got to this chapter on the hortatory subjunctive, I just couldn't tear myself away. I'll go back to writing now..."

Barely a minute had gone by when Billy's voice interrupted Bunker's attempted concentration.

"Doesn't this make more sense?" asked Billy.

"Doesn't what make more sense?" Bunker's eyes searched the room for a sign of Billy and finally found him at the window seat nearest to the door, completely inverted.

"Dude, what are you doing? You're completely inverted!"

"I'm just proving that these hot window seats are much more comfortable if you sit in them upside down. See, my head is on the floor and my legs are in the air."

"Yeah, I see it and now I have to also explain to my dad that my roommate is freakin' Gerald McBoing-Boing!"

"Come over here and try it! The proof is in the pudding... that's probably somewhere in the Latin book."

"Dude, I am trying to write a very serious letter to my very serious father and your feats of levitation are not helping me at all."

"OK, OK, I'm sorry. Tell me what you've got so far."

"Well... not too much down on paper yet, it's mostly still in my head."

"Well, read me what you've got down on paper so far."

Bunker straightened himself in his chair and cleared his throat.

"Dear Dad..." he began, then stopped.

"Go on."

"That's it. That's all I have so far."

"'Dear dad' is it? That's all you have so far? Ten minutes and that's all you've written?" Billy started to laugh.

"I don't find this very amusing."

"I think it's the funniest thing since sliced bread! 'Dear Dad!'" He couldn't stop laughing.

Bunker got up and marched over to Billy, whose long legs were fanning the air as he laughed.

"It is not funny!" exclaimed Bunker. "And neither is your inversion." He grabbed Billy's legs and tried to hold them still. "Inversion is not laughing matter!"

"From your lips to God's ears, Mr. Bocock" intoned a familiar deep, nasal voice.

It was Dean Oscarson, standing in the doorway.

"Uh, it's Bill Waldron's position, sir. While waiting, he's gotten somewhat inverted..."

"Kindly un-invert yourself Mr. Waldron, put on your jacket, and then both of you come over here. I wish to speak with you."

The boys quickly complied, grabbing their books and straightening their ties. Billy's face was beet red and he was making a desperate, but not completely successful, attempt to stop laughing.

"Mr. Waldron. Mr. Bocock. It is the considered opinion of Headmaster Esty and the disciplinary committee that for your transgressions against the school's rules... you should not receive... any penalty." He let his words sink in.

"No penalty, sir?" asked Bunker, trying to comprehend what he was hearing.

"No penalty whatsoever," said Dean Oscarson. "Due to the extremely unusual circumstances, it was our considered opinion that no penalty shall be applied. In fact, the incident will not even go onto your permanent record."

"You mean we're not on bounds? We're not suspended or expelled or anything?" asked Billy.

"It's as if nothing ever happened at all," replied Mr. Oscarson, with a slightly sardonic smile upon his lips.

Bunker began to clap his hands while Billy jumped in the air and executed a perfect pirouette.

"It never happened?" asked Bunker, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry.

"Never happened. Now, compose yourselves!" With a great effort, they boys did.

"I wish to remind you," said Mr. Oscarson as he lit a cigarette with his Zippo, "that the possession or smoking of cigarettes by underclassmen is in violation of the school rules, as set forth in the Student Handbook." He exhaled a large cloud of smoke. "So behave accordingly."

"Yes, sir," said Billy.

"Yes, sir," said Bunker.

"And now, have you anything to say for yourselves?"

"No, sir," snapped Billy. The Dean looked to Bunker.

"I do, sir," said Bunker, after a second. He opened the Latin book to page thirty-seven, held it up, and proclaimed loudly: "Sic semper tyrannis!"

In spite of himself, Donald Oscarson laughed out loud. Loud and long. And when the Dean laughed, he shook like a bowl full of jelly.

"You've got five hours until dinner," said Oscie when he had partly recovered. "Please, for my sake, attempt to stay out of trouble."

"Yes, sir!" said Billy.

Turning to leave, Mr. Oscarson spied the empty pizza box.

"Allow me to dispose of this for you-- in the proper receptacle," said the Dean, and he was gone.

Billy turned to Bunker. "Did you see what just happened? The Dean of the Taft School took out our garbage!" said Billy, beaming.

"He has restored my faith in the system!" exclaimed Bunker. "Except... what can be done about that bastard?"

"Which one?" asked Billy.

"Perry Ferry. If we're innocent, then he's guilty."

Billy thought for a second. "My favorite grandmother Mudgie would say, 'Leave it to a higher power. Trust in a high power.' So that's what I suggest."

"How do you mean?" asked Bunker.

"Something like this happened to her. There was this nasty old bitch who lived next door. An evil snake. Mudgie decided to put the matter into the hands of a higher power."

"So what happened?"

"The old bitch doesn't live there anymore."

"And?"

"She doesn't live anywhere anymore."

"Ah!"

At that very second there was a sharp tapping on the bay window.

"It's Jeff Lord, Jack Frost, and Kelly Green!" exclaimed Billy, as he and Billy scrambled over to the window seat.

Billy swung open the window, and yelled "Hey guys! We got off!"

"It never happened!" added Bunker.

"We know!" replied Jeff, grinning like a beach boy. He held up a finger to his lips and said "Charades!" He then mimed steering a car and honking a horn.

"It's about a car!" said Billy. Jeff tapped his nose, indicating that Billy was correct.

Then Jeff held up Billy's Avenger pinup and pointed to it repeatedly and dramatically.

"It's about Perry Ferry's Avenger!" exclaimed Bunker. Again, Jeff put his finger to his nose.

From beneath his winter coat, Jack Frost produced a large metal funnel bearing the painted inscription "Property of John Spafford."

The boys grinned at each other and exclaimed "Dykes!"

Jack moved behind Jeff Lord and held the funnel above the pinup.

The significantly taller and left-handed Kelly Green then moved behind Jack Frost and produced a fifty pound sack of sugar which he pantomimed pouring into the funnel.

"You put sugar in Perry Ferry's gas tank?" gasped Billy.

Jeff Lord put his finger to his nose, and the three hurriedly scurried out of sight. Billy closed the window, and the boys stared at each other in a great state of excitement.

"Higher power?" asked Bunker. Billy just shrugged and blushed.

"You are now officially my favorite Martian!" exclaimed Bunker.

There came another tap at the window. This time, it was Plunkie Plymouth and Didi Dodge.

"Over the river!" mouthed Plunkie.

"And through the woods," mimed Didi. And then they too were gone.

"This is shaping up to be a pretty good day, after all," laughed Bunker. "A pretty damned good day!"

"But what about the letter to your dad?"

"Oh, I can write that any old day."

The boys rushed to tidy the room and stepped out onto Nicotine Boulevard just in time to overhear the excited voice of Dolores Valleta, Oscie's ever-efficient secretary.

"Mr. Whipp telephoned, sir, and said the boy called Angel Dave is changing roommates and moving in with the boy called Dire Wolfe. Also, Mr. Valentine phoned and said Angel Dave is transferring to his English II honors section, effective tomorrow morning. The grounds crew says that Perry Ferry's car won't start, and it just came over the radio that the captain of the Varsity hockey team at Hotchkiss has been electrocuted."

The boys wandered down the empty hallway in a daze.

"Do you know what would be the perfect ending to this perfect day?" asked Billy.

"What?"

"Some smokes!" Let's get some smokes!"

"Perfect idea!" said Bunker. "But where?"

They looked at each other and both replied at once:
"Dykes!"

As they raced down the resonant gothic corridor toward Bingham Auditorium, in perfect harmony they sang their favorite stanza from "Bus Stop."

All the people stared as if we were both quite insane...

Billy tossed Bunker Spafford's theme book and cartwheeled himself towards the great medieval doors.

A huge grin broke out over Bunker's handsome bespectacled boy face.